

Flatmates

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Summary: He's just moved in, and his flatmate's a girl. He's supposed to live there for three years so he can attend Shinsengumi University. But even three months can change someone's life. - romance, but mostly friendship. hints of Chizuru/Hijikata, Okita/Chizuru, and Saitou/OC. -

1. 001

001:

First day Saitou's moved in. He decided to go to Shinsengumi University because his parents insisted, he had the brains, and oh - what luck. There was the possibility of a flatmate so someone could 'take care of him,' as his mother put it. Saitou's still convinced that his mother just didn't want to pay for room and board. But oh well. Negotiations were settled before he was even informed of it. His 'flatmate' was about his age - _she was 19; hello mother, that's nowhere **close** to eighteen except compared to thirty-eight, try twelve months! _- had a good height _- still shorter than him, though - _light haired - _unusual in Japan, but whatever, unless it was dyed _- blue eyed - _maybe contacts - _and seemed to be a guy, from the picture given to him, but then again...one could never tell.

Okita insisted on teasing the hell out of him. "What if he's gay? Or better yet, what if your flat-buddy's a girl?"

Saitou beat his ass at kendo and shut him up.

He lugs his crap into the apartment. He's a day early, but decided to take the metro here in spite of his mom. She didn't look sorry to see him go. The place looks pretty decent from where he's standing in the vestibule, and it doesn't look like a _guy_ lives here. In fact, there's no sign that _anyone_ lives here, or is currently breathing here.

Then he steps into the living room and wants to take it all back, call his mother, and tell her not to be a cheapskate and let him live on campus at Shinsen-Uni. The place is practically overwhelmed with shit. He can't live here. Not here, where clothes are strewn all over the floor and - is that left-over ramen on the coffee table? Oh ****kami, **he's fucked.**

"Yo," a voice says. "Is your hair dyed?"

Saitou turns around carefully, cautiously. As soon as he sees his roommate, his heart sinks. His flatmate's a girl. She's dressed like a slob, oversized grey t-shirt and sweatpants, hair thrown into a messy ponytail, and her eyes... She doesn't have contacts. She's wearing glasses. Shaking her head slightly, she takes them off and holds them in her slightly slackened and slender fingers.

"No," he responds. "Who are you?"

Yes, he sounds rude, even to himself. But this girl is his flatmate. This girl. He'll be living with a girl for three years he's attending Shinsengumi University.

This, apparently, is all the prompting needed. The girl, leaning against the wall, shrugs. "The name's Nanami." She doesn't extend her hand or look faintly excited, like most girls are when introducing themselves to him. "Until I find a better surname than my bastard of a father's, you can just address me by that. See that door?" She points to it. "Behind it is a Baldwin Grand. Worth more than this flat and my ass. Play on it all you like - just don't break it. I hate mushrooms, cucumbers, peppers, and am desperately allergic to cough syrup and meds. Also, don't mess around with the sheet music - it'll all get jumbled up and last time I screwed up the order, one of my rondo's turned into a sonata. Not that it was bad or anything. If you get on my bad side..." She trails off with a laugh and shrugs again. "I like peanut butter. So. Tell me about yourself, if you'd like."

Saitou's going to be living here for three years.

Doesn't seem habitable.

2. 002

****002:****

Nanami convinces Saitou to 'bang on her piano for a while to loosen up' while she goes out to buy groceries. Saitou relocates himself lackadaisically to the now-dubbed 'piano room' and sits on the soft bench. He sighs. Is he seriously going to be staying with a girl? When Okita comes to visit, it's going to be hell.

Saitou glances over the surface of the piano and finds next to the music stand, there's a mess of papers. None of them have a relatively famous composer's name on them. Not even a composer's name on them. Just notes and bar lines on some sort of weathered parchment. For what seems like hours, he gazes at the measures. Then, the door opens, and Nanami's voice comes floating in, audible through the walls of the piano room.

"Forgot to ask," she says loudly, and doesn't even sound out of breath. "What's your phone number?"

Saitou comes out of the piano room and attempts to find a pen and paper. At least, he tries to do even that, but with an impatient tap of the foot, she simply takes him by the arm, mutters, "Takes too long," and drags him out the door, locking it behind her and handing him her odd, old-fashioned phone.

"What are you doing?" he asks, startled. He's uncomfortably aware of the fact that her slender fingers - but strong and sinewy - are wrapped around his wrist almost gently.

"You're coming shopping with me," she replies, looking at him, puzzled, as if this is the most natural thing on earth next to fires in forests. "After all, we need to get used to what the other needs to get so it can be a one-stop trip to the convenience store each time. And put your number in the phone so we can keep in contact. If I get murdered, my killer will probably know to call you."

"Ha-ha," Saitou deadpans, but nevertheless puts in his phone number. "Anything else?" he inquires as he hands her back her phone.

"Oh yeah!" Nanami exclaims. "I forgot to ask another question. What's your name?"

3. 003

003:

Okita calls for the first time. Nanami answers. This is disaster waiting to happen. Saitou groans to himself as he finally gives up trying to get his phone back. Nanami is too commanding, he figures.

At last, when he goes to the kitchen to prepare dinner - she cannot cook to save her life and lives on instant noodles, the poor thing - Nanami places the phone between his ear and shoulder, her fingers brushing against his jaw. "Here you go," she says, grinning. "I didn't know you had a boyfriend..."

Saitou almost allows the phone to drop and break. "What?"

"It's okay, Saitou-kun," she reassures him teasingly. "I have nothing against you...just the fact that you might get more dates than me -"

"You asshole, Okita," he says angrily into the phone and Nanami starts to laugh really hard - as in, clutching the counter and halfway-kneeling on the floor, trying to keep her balance and her gut from splitting - peering up at Saitou through her light-haired bangs. "Never call me again, bastard."

"Chill, chill," Okita says. "Your flatmate's a girl? Lucky ass. Is she free?"

"Shut the hell up, you," Saitou mutters. "Nanami, can you hang up the phone for me?"

"Sure thing." Nanami takes the phone. Then, she states loudly, "No, he's my blue-haired teddy bear now, ballsucker. Should've pinned him while you had the chance. Oh, you want mine Sure." She starts to give him her phone number, and by the end, Saitou's eyes are filled with incredulity. His face is expressionless.

"Nanami," he protests.

She hangs up and turns to Saitou, grinning. "_Relax_", Saitou! I gave him Yuuki's phone number. She'll get drunkass-pissed at me, but it'll be worth the show. Come on. Don't tell me you don't want to see her yell at me and hurl shitloads of abuse at me because I'm such a bad friend and lack proper social skills."

Saitou sighs deeply and informs her flatly, "I don't."

4. 004

**004: **

She's a musical prodigy. He doesn't know this until today, when she comes out of the bathroom dressing semi-formal, but still in black jeans. She's wearing a suit over a white t-shirt. Seeing his resigned gaze, she smiles. "Hey. It's about as professional as I get."

He doesn't say anything, but she answers his unspoken question.

"I'm going to a...sort of a party, I guess. They want me to play there." She jerks a thumb at the door to the piano room. "Kind of like I do here. I'll probably be back late."

Nanami doesn't come back to the flat until maybe 10:45. Saitou's still up, studying for a history final. She comes back looking tired as hell and doesn't even lock the door until she realises she hasn't - then she goes back and locks it, sighing and breathing almost shallowly. She's out of breath. Saitou looks up to find her rubbing her eyes cantankerously.

"Fucking primps," she mutters. She splays herself on the couch, _right on Saitou's lap_, and closes her eyes.

"Hey," he protests. "What are you - "

Nanami opens her eyes again, but ignores his startled, cut-off question. "I'm so worn out it's not even funny. Who the hell do they think they are?"

Saitou really needs to study for this final. In fact, he's only halfway through the chapter section and hasn't memorized a single thing. But the look on Nanami's face, of pure, unbridled hatred, prompts him to ask her cautiously what's wrong.

She replies, her tone filled with annoyance, "They talk behind your back when you're a wunderkind."

"Wunderkind?" he repeats.

She shrugs, and he feels her arm brushing against his abdomen. She clicks her tongue in irritation and looks at the ceiling blankly.

"Prodigy. Music. I was asked to perform."

It's true she plays wonderfully. Saitou often finds himself falling asleep in his room, hearing her play out one of her melodies. But it never occurs to him that _she_ wrote them herself. "You wrote those songs?" he asks.

She waves it off almost easily, but he's secretly impressed.

He's living with a musical _prodigy_.

5. 005

005:

His classmate makes him feel uncomfortable. She asks to walk with him home from the university - or at least, to his flat, and he's desperately hoping she'll retract that offer when he tells her how far away it is from the university. Truthfully, it's not. But he gives a random address, knowing it's on the other side of Tokyo. Hoping it is, anyway. She replies that it's not that long and would be glad to spend more time with him though.

Oh **kami**.

"Let's go!" she declares cheerfully, linking her arm with his.

Saitou wants to groan secretly, but keeps his face straight and attempts to ignore how pressed up against him she is.

Then, shit hits the fan. Nanami is walking around in the streets, having lazily thrown on last night's jeans and - _is that Saitou's shirt? The hell? _For a moment, he stares at her in shock, but she doesn't notice. Instead, she goes up to the nearest stall and orders an ice cream. Saitou slows down. His classmate stands with him and asks him what's wrong. He shakes his head, says it's nothing, but calls out Nanami's name.

Nanami turns around, almost questioningly, and then her eyes widen as she sees Saitou. "Yo!" she says, waving them over.

Saitou wonders why he thought Nanami would save him from this predicament. His classmate makes them sit down across from Nanami, who is delightfully eating her ice cream with a plastic red spoon. He feels a bit discomfited as he watches her, almost a bit too carefully to his liking. He notices the way her light hair rests against her pale neck. Her father or mother must have been a foreigner. And the other parent must have had the genes for light hair...but blue eyes as well? The girl sitting next to him nudges him and asks him if he feels hot. He shakes his head and averts his gaze from Nanami, who finishes eating her ice cream and gets up to toss it into the trash can.

When she comes back, she extends her hand to Saitou and says apologetically to his classmate, "Thanks, I'll take him home now. He's my flatmate."

The look on the girl's face is priceless. She stares at Nanami for a

moment and then releases Saitou's arm, stuttering, "I-I'm sorry, I h-had no idea he was y-your...", stepping back with a slight flush to her cheeks and walking away hurriedly. Nanami looks confused and tilts her head to the side as she turns to Saitou, who takes her hand without thinking.

"What the hell was that?" she asks as they walk back to the apartment, in the opposite way of where the girl went.

Saitou sighs. "It looked fairly obvious, didn't it?" He glances back to Nanami and sees that she has a smudge of chocolate ice cream on the corner of her mouth.

Absentmindedly and inadvertently - _to this day, he still insists it was on accident because he wasn't thinking - _he licks his thumb and wipes the spot. Surprised, she jumps at the contact and says, trailing off, "Wha..." He simply wipes his thumb on his pants and continues walking. Nanami is even more confused. Saitou doesn't respond to her questioning gaze, suddenly registering what he's done and feeling awfully embarrassed for it.

Yes, what the hell _was_ that?

6. 006

006:

In Saitou's defense, she was stone-ass drunk. Completely drunk without a clue of what she was doing. Saitou rarely sees her on weekdays and even less on weekends when she stays cooped up in the piano room. So this wasn't instigated by _him_. Oh, god no.

One day, she comes back half-way drunk and walks into him on accident in the living room.

"Sorry," Nanami mumbles, walking blindly to nowhere.

"Are you drunk?" he asks bluntly, because he doesn't like to waste time on idle chatter and Nanami looks obviously inebriated to a certain degree.

"No...just not sober."

"On drugs?"

She laughs, turning around and grasping his hand. "Of course not!" She looks incredulous. "That's dangerous to anyone's deteriorating health. I wouldn't do drugs like _he_ did."

"You're drunk," he says to himself quietly, sighing. He guides her to the couch. "Water?"

"I'm too young," she says instead. "Too young to die. It isn't fair." She now looks frustrated. "Drugs," she repeats, scoffing. "They aren't worth a damn."

Wordlessly, Saitou goes to get her water. How much she drank he has no idea, but it had to be more than five glasses at the least. To his surprise, she followed him into the kitchen without knocking anything

over.

"Saitou," she mumbled. "If you only had three months to live..."

"Why are you asking me such a question?"

"Well, I..."

He shakes his head. "Here, go back to the couch - "

Nanami shakes her head too, but more firmly. "What would you do?" she reiterates.

"Live it the way I want to," he replies uneasily.

Nanami smiles almost unconsciously. Then she kisses him right on the cheek and makes him all flustered.

She's drunk, he reminds himself.

7. 007

007**:**

The next day, Saitou asks her if she's dying or has some disease that's going to kill her in the nearby future. Nanami brushes off his suspicion with a confusing reply that sort of throws him off his game. He didn't understand before, but now he does, now that she...

"Can't get sick any more," she answers and closes the door behind her to the piano room.

He ignores the odd feeling in his stomach, remembering yesterday when she was blind-drunk. _"If you had three months to live?"_ _"Live it the way I want."_ Nanami now stays up all night playing the piano, and though he falls asleep easily, when he sees her in the morning, feeling like he slept great, he can just as easily tell that she hasn't slept at all. The way she walks makes her look like she put her body through a grinder. Or that she stayed in one position for too long.

After she comes out, which is five hours later, without playing a single note on the piano - _though he heard something suspicious like coughing_ - she alerts him to the new rule.

"Saitou, don't go into the piano room anymore," she tells him calmly. She's rubbing this one spot on the back of her hand and it looks almost raw.

The curiosity is too great. "Why not?"

"I spilled some chemicals in there..." Seeing his questioning look, she elaborated further, but more reluctantly, "It smells horrible in there. And you might get sick. But I don't want to damage the piano by cleaning it up with the other cleaning supplies, so I'm just going to keep playing on it."

"Does your hand hurt?"

"Wh - oh, no, it's not my hand." Nanami smiles, and for a moment, he sees crimson on her white teeth. But only a speck. He blinks, and she stops smiling. "All right, well, I'm going to try to salvage my sheet music..."

She pulls out some sort of a white mask that covers her mouth and nose and makes a face. Then she tries to put it on, but it keeps slipping down. Saitou helps her without thinking, standing and taking the strings from her. He ties the knot firmly so it doesn't slide down, and his fingers brush against her neck gently. She almost seems to shiver but turns around, nods her thanks, and ties her hair into a ponytail. Then Saitou sees it. The inside of her palm is splattered with red. And it doesn't look like paint.

"Don't try to come in," she warns him. "I'm locking the door."

"Good luck," he says instead, feeling at a loss for words.

He's sure it's blood.

8. 008

008**:**

Nanami says she feels perfectly fine over the duration of two weeks. In fact, she's feeling so much better than she's cheerful. So automatically, Saitou thinks something is wrong. The light in her blue eyes is too bright, and her hair has a dull, unhealthy shine. She looks pale. Although he's forced her to go to sleep early many nights and she looks like she's slept, it doesn't look convincing. He's studying now, sprawled on the floor with his papers spread out before him. Nanami comes out from the bathroom, dressed like a slob as usual.

"I'll be leaving in two days," she informs him, "to go to some place."

"Some place," Saitou repeats, used to her ambiguous descriptions of certain locations.

She sighs and clarifies, "I have to go to this giant country called America for a week." Saitou's mind tells him, unbidden, that it's been three weeks since Nanami stumbled into the flat drunk. "Something about a convention, pianos, music, and composers. Meanwhile... I'm still serious. No matter what curiosity ails you - and my telling you not to probably isn't helping, but a girl can hope, right? - don't go into the piano room." She looks dead serious. "This is life and death." She doesn't even sound like she's joking.

Saitou nods. Right when he's about to ask if she wants him to accompany her to the airport, someone knocks on the door. Nanami sighs exasperatedly and goes to get the door. Saitou looks back down at his notes and realises that he hasn't read in a single thing. He's been too focused on the red-spattered palm, Nanami's pale, drawn face, and the piano room. But he said that he wouldn't go in the room...

Nanami comes back into the living room, and of all the three people he would expect, it's Chizuru, Hijikata, and Okita. Surprised, Saitou sits up, gathering his notes into one pile, and wants to ask them why they're here. Cheerfully, Chizuru beats him to the chase and explains that they've transferred to Shinsengumi University - then, Okita interrupts and tells him that he personally came to see Saitou's flatmate, to which Nanami flatly asks if he's 'Okita' and he confirms this question - and finally, Hijikata informs him that they'll be living on campus, but even then, they'll be visiting him almost every day, and that Okita has almost the exact same classes as Saitou.

On the other hand, while Chizuru and Okita look absolutely delighted, Saitou looks shocked, like the earth has just shattered around him.

Nanami laughs and tells him, "Say something, Saitou!"

"Did she send you here?" he asks flatly - the first thing he says after not seeing them for almost a month.

"Why, no," Hijikata replies. He smiles. "We came to visit you, and she told us that you lived with Nanami-san."

Okita is off to the side, chatting with Nanami and telling her that he got yelled at by 'Yuuki,' whose number Nanami had given him. "She screamed all this profanity in my ear. It was so surprising."

"That's what you get," Nanami answers smugly, crossing her thin - Saitou notices that they've gotten thinner. The sinews are somewhat visible. - arms over her abdomen.

Chizuru and Hijikata stand there awkwardly, but they look at each other, and Saitou can see how much they care about each other. Of course, it probably took Hijikata a helluva long time to figure it out. He might have been great with military tactics when they played Risk, but he was an absolute idiot when it came to love.

"Fast food, anyone?" Nanami asks, going over to the door. "I'm going out."

Saitou shakes his head, but Okita easily asks for a Coke. Nanami tells him flatly that she doesn't buy drugs, and he laughs and explains that it's a drink. Saitou simply tells the three visitors to sit down and wonders why his life suddenly feels like it's been turned upside down.

Nanami doesn't return for hours, even after Chizuru, Hijikata, and Okita have left. Saitou pretends not to worry.

End
file.